

Return to Use Initiative

2004 Demonstration Project

Butterworth Landfill: Grand Rapids, Michigan

THE SITE: Located near the center of Grand Rapids, Michigan, the Butterworth Landfill Superfund site occupies 120 acres along the Grand River. Beginning in 1950, the landfill operated first as an open dump and later as a sanitary landfill, leading to the contamination of both ground water and soils. Approximately 1,300 people live within a mile of the site.

THE OPPORTUNITY: In 2002, the City of Grand Rapids began to discuss possible future uses of the Butterworth Landfill site. The City of Grand Rapids approached EPA to inquire about what must be done to extend an existing bike trail onto the southern portion of the site. At EPA's request, the City performed a risk assessment to evaluate risks at the site post-remedy implementation. EPA also approached the City with an offer to participate in the Return to Use Initiative, a collaborative local and Agency effort to usher cleaned-up Superfund sites into reuse. Together, EPA and the City of Grand Rapids determined that there were manageable barriers that would hinder the recreational reuse of the Butterworth Landfill.

THE BARRIER: Once construction of the 2001 site remedy was completed, the fenced 120 acres remained unused by the nearby residents. Before reuse could move forward EPA needed assurance that any future users would not negatively impact the remedy and that the remedy would be protective for future recreational use.

THE SOLUTION: The City completed a risk assessment in July 2003 and submitted it to EPA for approval. On November 12, 2004, EPA made a national announcement to commemorate the Return to Use Initiative and community involvement at the Butterworth Landfill (pictured at right and below). At the announcement, then-Superfund Director Michael B. Cook and Grand Rapids Mayor George Heartwell endorsed the Initiative and the activities at Butterworth Landfill and rode bicycles on the landfill's former utility road as a demonstration of what the landfill's future will hold. The City of Grand Rapids Master Plan includes a bike route that will connect with existing roads on the Butterworth Landfill site. With EPA's approval, City of Grand Rapids officials plan to open the site to allow pedestrian and bicycle use. This is still planned but it has not yet been implemented.



Barriers: Perimeter fence restricting access; uncertain assessment of site risks; uncertainty about what future uses were appropriate on what areas of the site

Solution: Evaluating and implementing potential future uses; install gates in perimeter fence; qualitative risk assessment approved by EPA; enhanced stakeholder and community involvement process



Before: Cleaned-up landfill, ready for reuse; 120 acres of vacant, riverfront land surrounded by a fence

After: Extension of existing bike trail to go through the site and other recreational uses



THE PARK: EPA Region 5 is working with the City as it performs an enhanced stakeholder process at the Butterworth Landfill. EPA's participation in the process will ensure that the reuse activities do not interfere with the remedy or damage the landfill's vegetative cap. Public meetings were held in 2005 to help develop conceptual designs for the site and gather feedback. Several recreational groups have expressed interest in using the site for recreational purposes. Department of Parks and Recreation officials expect that the Butterworth Landfill recreation area will complement the nearby Millennium Park. EPA and the City of Grand Rapids are currently reviewing and evaluating the proposed uses in terms of site suitability as well as potential recreational phasing opportunities. Recently, EPA Region 5 provided resources to revise the site conceptual reuse plan to evaluate what types of uses the site can support in light of other anticipated recreational uses, consideration of a regional (western MI) sports complex on the western half of the site, and the limitations or planning associated with such an installation and ongoing remedy maintenance. Our work will include a revised site conceptual plan that incorporates a sports complex/facility (it's fields, really....).



FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT: Dion Novak, remedial project manager for the site at (312) 886-4737 or novak.dion@epa.gov or Tom Bloom, Region 5 Superfund Redevelopment Coordinator, at (312) 886-1967 or bloom.thomas@epa.gov.



Top to Bottom: Superfund Director Michael B. Cook (far left) announces the Return to Use Initiative at the Butterworth Landfill in November 2004, joined by George Heartwell (second from left), Mayor of Grand Rapids, and Jay Steffen (far right), Director of Parks and Recreation in the City of Grand Rapids; paved path to be used by bicyclists and pedestrians; view of the Grand River from the site.